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A vision for feminist peace

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Across the world, women's and feminist groups are using legal and policy tools creatively to advance equal rights. Yet transformative change remains slow. Women are still fighting for equality in all spheres of life. Peace remains an elusive goal. Ahead of a digital programme of events "[Visions of Feminist Peace](#)" [Louise Arimatsu](#), [Christine Chinkin](#) and [Keina Yoshida](#) discuss how

principles of peace in international law and help transform everyday structural inequalities.

Since April 2018 we have been working under the AHRC-funded research project on a [Feminist International Law on Peace and Security](#) on re-imagining a feminist peace: what this might look like and what it might take to transform international law and international legal institutions to encompass more fully peace for all peoples rather than the current centring on state sovereignty and

security. Core to this is drafting a declaratory vision of a feminist peace engaging the feminist methodology of adopting well understood forms of expression and subverting them to our objectives. The inspiration for this approach comes from other such subversions – the various [feminist judgment](#) projects, [women's courts and tribunals](#) – which provide spaces for reflections on how the law might be transformed if women's voices were listened to and their experiences taken seriously.

The Concept /Rationale

Despite the progressive claims of international law, there is no accepted legal definition of either peace or security in international law. The ambiguity in both concepts allows the Security Council and others leeway in their interpretation. It also presents a fundamental question from a feminist perspective: should legal ambiguity be embraced or rejected? Further, would a gendered rights-based approach resolve this problem?

The Security Council does purport to address both concepts [in its series of resolutions on Women, Peace and Security](#) but in reality it illuminates neither: peace is barely referenced and security remains narrowly depicted as state security within the framework of international peace and security.

Human security for women is perceived primarily in terms of protection against conflict-affected sexual violence. This fails to take account of other threats to women's security that must be addressed if women are to live in peace: food security, water security, health security, environmental security – these and other threats to security that emanate from [slow violence](#) and systemic and intersecting inequalities.

The Security Council does not address how militarism, availability of arms, colonial depredation, discriminations, neo-liberal economic policies and environmental or climate harm all undermine peace. Nor does it recognise the diversity of women and their situations. Accordingly, our first idea was to draft an alternative UN Security Council resolution, what the Council might adopt if it took seriously “[that sustainable peace requires an integrated approach based on coherence between political, security, development, human rights, including gender equality, and rule of law and justice activities](#)”, as well as a fuller understanding of gender and the hierarchy of gender relations.



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To approach the 'vision' as an alternative UNSC WPS resolution, as outlined above, was discarded after important methodological questions were raised. Professor Di Otto asked us "why isn't the Security Council called the Peace Council?" and what changes would be necessitated if it was? Reflections on what sources we would draw on stemmed from this query – would we use those of international law or others? This is a dilemma that feminist academics and activists have long struggled with, perhaps especially in this case those that lobbied the UNSC for the adoption of the WPS agenda.

Getting WPS on the UNSC agenda was and is a "[multifaceted and complex story with many different actors](#)", with the groundwork conducted primarily by [NGOs](#). The negotiation that had to take place to get member states to adopt Resolution 1325 and WPS broadly is indicative of the struggles that feminist activists can have in institutional spaces; as Chris Whitman asks "[must you choose between a language of neutrality, which provides credibility but disables you from saying those things you most need to say, and a feminist language, which allows you to say those things at the cost of being believed?](#)". What are the costs, the benefits and the trade-offs that we make in writing our vision in the language of the law? We are conscious that we are lawyers but whose voices are thereby excluded?

Instead, in drafting our vision we have borrowed from a range of global and regional human rights treaties, notably the [Banjul Charter](#) and its [Maputo Protocol](#) that both include a right to peace; human rights soft law; national constitutions; the global summits on women; arms control and disarmament treaties; environmental and climate change standards and the 2017 [UNGA Declaration on a Right to Peace](#), itself reaffirming respect for the UN Charter.

We have also turned to feminist reworkings of key documents that challenge the international status quo or seek to repair its gaps and omissions. These include the rewriting by the Committee of Latin America and Caribbean for the Defense of Women's Rights (CLADEM) of the '[Universal Declaration of Human Rights from a Gender Perspective](#)', the [Santiago Declaration on the Human Right to Peace](#), the *Montréal Principles on Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, the Nairobi Declaration on Women's and Girls; Right to a Remedy and Reparation. We have also sought inspiration from the resolutions adopted by the women who gathered in The Hague in 1915 and Zurich in 1919 and the [subsequent manifestos of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom](#) (WILPF).



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These alternatives demonstrate how although the language of the law is often co-opted it can also be recaptured to centre the peace agenda and that women throughout history have shown the way. As the shared reflection published in [Feminist Legal Studies](#) on the African, Indian and Scottish feminist judgment project notes “Oppressive norms and practices can be destabilised through genealogical critique that reveals their contingency, and indigenous pasts can be mined for alternative futures”. These futures must embrace not just people but also nature, living creatures and the planet itself.

Similarly, our methodological conversations led us to look beyond international law and legal rewrites to alternative sources by feminist poets, in literature, in civil society initiatives and also to consider alternative cosmologies. We think much further work could be done to incorporate such perspectives into the fabric of international law for its reconstruction and transformation.

This last is the most challenging: what transformative principles can we urge upon states, international institutions, civil society, and others? With this in mind, we have challenged ourselves to see how we can re-capture the language of the law and to re-centre the principle of peace in international law in what we are calling a vision – not a resolution or a declaration- but one example of an alternative feminist vision of peace.

The Process

Drafting the feminist vision of peace has been a lengthy and collaborative process with twists and turns. We sought different disciplinary voices through a series of interactive seminars with input from feminist scholars and practitioners of architecture, development studies, linguistics, international relations, history, global health policy and film.

We are also aware that further constraints and exclusions are imposed by writing in English, a language of colonialism. As academics and lawyers situated in the Global North we remain cognisant to the violence of language and to the fact that fidelity to thought is always lost in articulation. Our text must therefore also serve as a reminder of what has been promised but not delivered.

The pandemic has also made us rethink and re-evaluate what peace might mean in the future. It has challenged us to reflect once again on the brutal and structural inequalities which continue to deny peace to so many people through racism, colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism. The pandemic is also a reminder, should one be necessary, of the difficult place the state occupies in the thinking of feminist international lawyers.

The state has taken central stage with many world leaders [adopting a militaristic stance](#) to combat the virus, leading to feminist discomfort. As Cynthia Enloe has argued (see [here](#) and [here](#)) governments around the world have used the language of war as “the most deceptively alluring analogy for mobilizing private and public resources to meet a present danger.” Instead she invites us to consider approaches that enhance social justice, gender equity and sustainable peace.



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We had intended to make the draft vision the centrepiece of a day long Congress in London in September to celebrate the United Nations

[International Day of Peace](#) (21 September) but this has of course been prevented by the pandemic. In its place we have [planned a virtual programme to be held over three weeks](#) (14 September – 2 October) which will bring together academic reflections with artistic celebrations, readings and musings on what might be the elements of a feminist peace. The virtual programme aims to contribute to an interdisciplinary, inclusive and expansive, intergenerational vision of feminist peace. Using digital technologies to connect with people more widely the programme will promote knowledge and experience exchange and hope to build solidarity within a global community.

The document that will be made virtually available is in our minds simply a draft, a work in progress, and the beginning of a conversation. Once posted we will seek criticism, further input and hope that in this way it will be enriched and thus resonate more widely with those who seek a world committed to peace.

Visions of Feminist Peace will run from Monday the 14th September – Friday 2nd October. You can register your interest and sign-up to receive updates [here](#).

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Louise Arimatsu is Distinguished Policy Fellow in the Centre for Women, Peace and Security, where she works on the AHRC project 'A Feminist International Law of Peace and Security' and the ERC project 'Gendered Peace'. Her current research projects include 'A Feminist Foreign Policy'



Christine Chinkin

Christine Chinkin is a leading expert on international law and human rights law, especially the international human rights of women. In 2000, her co-authored, ground-breaking book with Hilary Charlesworth, 'The Boundaries of International Law: a feminist analysis' examined the status of women in human rights and international law'. In 2005, in recognition of this and other contributions, Chinkin and Charlesworth were awarded the American Society of International Law, Goler T. Butcher Medal 'for outstanding contributions to the development or effective realization of international human rights law'.



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Keina Yoshida is a Research Officer in the Centre for Women, Peace, and Security, where she works on the AHRC funded project Feminist Approaches to the International Law of Peace and Security (FILPS).

Keina is researching the links between the environment, nature, sustainable development goals, the gendered causes and impacts of violence against women, and structural inequalities in the context of international legal conceptions of peace and security. she tweets @intlawninja.

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